

Sherborne Farm  
(The Farm)  
(Liberty Hall)  
(White House of New Jersey)  
New Jersey Coastal Heritage Trail  
319 Liberty Avenue  
Beach Haven  
Ocean County  
New Jersey

HABS No. NJ-1106

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PHOTOGRAPHS  
WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

Historic American Buildings Survey  
National Park Service  
Washington, D.C. 20013-7127

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## HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY

SHERBORNE FARM  
(The Farm)  
(Liberty Hall)  
(White House of New Jersey)

HABS no. NJ-1106

Location: 319 Liberty Avenue, Beach Haven, Ocean County, New Jersey

Present Owner: James A. and Ethel B. Frazer  
Meyerville Road, Green Village, New Jersey, 07935

Present Use: Summer residence

Significance: Designed by a Philadelphia architect for his personal use, the Sherborne "Farm" tells us about both the limited nature of farming on the barrier island, and the recreational activities of the wealthy men who journeyed to the shore. The farmhouse was later used as a guesthouse to accommodate wealthy sportgunning enthusiasts. The building's history illustrates how Beach Haven's development was tied to the business, professional, and political elite of Philadelphia, New York, and New Jersey. The "Farm" was also known in the 1910's and 1920's as the "White House of New Jersey."

### PART I. HISTORICAL INFORMATION

#### A. Physical History:

1. Date of erection: The farmhouse was erected ca. 1874; It was significantly altered ca. 1910 for use as a guesthouse.
2. Architect: Architect Thomas P. Sherborne, Jr., of Philadelphia designed this house for his own use.
3. Original and subsequent owners: Thomas P. Sherborne, Jr. assembled the property which would comprise the "Farm" in 1873 and 1874. In 1901, he transferred ownership to his children Thomas H. Sherborne, Francis W., and Charles E. Sherborne. Two years later, the children transferred ownership to the Beach haven Land Company, which they appeared to own. Charles W. Beck bought the property in 1909. In 1944 the Beck's sold the estate to Samuel Kleva, who one year later sold it

to Morris and Mabel Connor. Mabel Connor was widowed and in 1949 sold the property to James and Emily Montavi of Trenton. In 1954, the Montavi's sold it to Loren and Evelyn Keating of Philadelphia. The current owners purchased the property, which was being run as a boarding house "The Evelyn" in 1971.<sup>1</sup>

4. Builders: Thomas P. Sherborne, Jr.<sup>2</sup>
5. Alterations and Additions: Early photos show that from the 1870s until about 1912, although large and gracious, the house had relatively few external decorative details--although it did possess a porch which wrapped around the west, south, and north sides of the house. Charles W. Beck raised the house six feet, adding a brick cellar, added a front porch balustrade of diagonally crossed bars, screened in the front porch and put on awnings. He expanded the living room and dining room and added a sun parlor by enclosing the north and south porches. The raising required a staircase entry with railings matching the balustrade, and later a portico was added.

#### B. Historical Context:

During the middle decades of the nineteenth century, Long Beach Island's three sportsmen's hotels accommodated the men who wished to shoot waterfowl and other birds: Harvey Cedars Hotel, Bond's Long Beach House, and the Mansion of Health.<sup>3</sup> The trip from Manhattan to Long Beach Island in 1869, including a dinner stop in Tom's River, took from six to eight hours. One-story boarding hotels offered rough accommodations to men who savored a

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<sup>1</sup> See the following deed books, Ocean County Clerk's Office: Book 3177, p.695; Book 1542, p.8; Book 1343, p.499; Book 1189, p.124; Book 1148, p.64; Book 337, p.206; Book 275, p.201; Book 261, p.368.

<sup>2</sup> Charles Edgar Nash wrote a series on "The Farm" for the Beach Haven Times which appeared in late 1979 and early 1980. The xeroxes I used often obscured the exact date, so I will refer to the "Part" of the series. The reference to Sherborne as the builder is in Part X.

<sup>3</sup>The following four paragraphs rely upon John Bailey Lloyd, Six Miles at Sea: A Pictorial History of Long Beach Island (Harvey Cedars, NJ: Down the Shore Publishing and The SandPaper, Inc., 1990), pp.34-43.

frontier-like experience; these visitors courted the loneliness and discomfort of gunning trips, seeing in them a confirmation of adventurous masculinity. One required money to pursue these wilderness excursions, to afford the proper clothing, gun, dog, and the costs of transportation and lodging. Successful sportsmen cultivated a certain mystique and prestige.

By the 1890s the sportsmen's hotels had begun to decline, as a direct train connection in 1886 ended the island's isolation, and people began constructing large, elegant "cottages," particularly in the Beach Haven area. Advances in shotgun technology in the decades since the Civil War greatly increased the popularity of sportgunning. The breech-loaded shotgun with cartridges replaced the muzzle-loaded version, allowing more flexibility in reloading and quickly changing shell models. During the last years of the nineteenth century, aristocratic gun clubs provided gunners with the facilities and bayside access they desired, taking the place of the hotels. The club form of organization was also more suitable in a community which had begun to establish permanent summer residences.

Another group of hunters brought more devastation to the Island's abundant birdlife--the professional market gunners. These men supplied city markets in the region until the Federal Migratory Bird Act of 1918 defined their activities as illegal. The Act also set bag limits, and forbid individuals to sell ducks. Laws as early as 1901 began to set limits on these hunters, regulating their hours, and requiring that their boats be moored to land. Several specific gunning tactics--such as artificial islands--used by both the market gunners and the sportsmen were also outlawed as giving men an unfair advantage and allowing mass slaughters. By the early 1930s, several factors contributed to a dramatic decline in the abundance of birdlife. Once the automobile had access to the island in 1914, the middle-class swelled the ranks of gunners. Eelgrass blight, a national prairie drought, and extensive marsh draining had taken their toll on waterfowl. The gun clubs had mostly disappeared by this time.

The "Farm" should be understood in relationship to the sporting hotels and gun clubs on Long Beach Island.<sup>4</sup> During the 1910s and 1920s Beck hosted his friends on their sporting expeditions; three rooms on the third floor were designated for guests, and other rooms could be mustered as needed. These

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<sup>4</sup> The following discussion of the Farm under Beck has been drawn from the Beach Haven Times series late 1979 to 1980, written by Beck's grandson Charles Edgar Nash. Citations refer to the "Part" of the series.

regular visitations earned the home the nickname of "Liberty Hall" (after the adjacent street), and "White House of New Jersey." Numerous photographs have survived of the shooting parties and their kill, as well as the men indulging in band instruments, another pastime at the farm. Beck was a member (and officer) of the Beach Haven Gun Club, founded shortly after the turn of the century by a Philadelphian, John Dickerson (the club existed for less than two decades). In 1907 the club expanded to yachting, but was not on the water, and suffered competition when the Baldwin Hotel opened winterized rooms for gunners.

Charles W. Beck, born in 1851, tried his luck at several different endeavors without much success, until he took over an engraving and printing business. Beck produced the first three and four-color "wet" printing in the United States, making him a prominent Philadelphia citizen connected with the city's influential circles. He worked closely with National Geographic, among other publications. Beck's association with Beach Haven began in 1898 when he was invited to bring out a large group to attend the opening party for the town's Baldwin Hotel. For several years after that he stayed with his family at the Baldwin, and in 1906 purchased a large cottage one block north of the hotel. In June 1906 Beck began Beach Haven's first paper, a weekly--The Breeze, which he produced in Philadelphia.

Beck bought the farm in 1910 from Sherborne. The period of Sherborne's ownership is far less well documented; an architect, he apparently designed the house himself, with a rear wing for servants and perhaps a caretaker (as Beck later used it). Sherborne also managed a widely-appreciated farm on the island's sandy soil, and according to Beck's grandson, raised blooded horses. When Beck took over the property, it was the only significant farm on the Island; the early sportsmen's hotels such as Harvey Cedars and Bond's had kept gardens, but no longer.<sup>5</sup> "Kitchen garden" might better describe the farm under Beck's ownership; according to his grandson's description, it occupied about one acre. Relatives teased Beck about the care he lavished on his corn, and he vowed that he would raise the corn whatever the cost. There was one milk cow, and Fred, a rejuvenated glue-factory candidate from Camden, pulled the plow.<sup>6</sup> In other words, although there is little documentation on Sherborne's farming, Beck's garden would hardly qualify as a farm by rural South New Jersey standards.

Beck kept his house at the cutting edge of technological

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<sup>5</sup> Charles Edgar Nash, series on the "Farm," Part VIII.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid., Part IX.

innovation, and encouraged the other organizations he belonged to and the borough to do the same. His grandson describes, for example, the acetylene gas system the house used, and that he convinced Beach Haven to install an acetylene plant to replace kerosene lamps. And before the town had electricity, Beck replaced his gas plant with a 32-volt generator.<sup>7</sup>

Beck's grandson, and photographs, provide a sense of the furnishings and use of the house's rooms, as well as the hospitality provided by Beck.<sup>8</sup> Today the home has many of Beck's furnishings, and Nash relates that Beck bought "simple little tables, washstands and cottage bureaus," as well as flowered crockery from England (some from shipwrecks) from Bond's historic Long Beach House when it was demolished in 1909 (operated 1840s-1880s). Beck's son Charlie brought friends from New York, many were members of the Player's Club. Beck's guests preferred his full set of band instruments. Guests of wide reputation included congressmen and governors, newspaper columnist and humorist Franklin Adams, wildlife artist Louis Agassiz Fuertes, National Geographic Magazine artists and editors.

The shooting, the socializing, and the music signify a men's recreational world (tied tightly to their professional worlds), confirmed in the photographs, which rarely include women. This, at least, was the image these men seemed to relish. This "farm," apparently more open to male visitors, provided an alternative along with the gun clubs, to the "predominantly feminine 'rocking chair fleets' on the hotel and cottage porches."<sup>9</sup> The history of the farm and the social circle which patronized it also highlights Beach Haven's dependency on Philadelphia during these early decades of the twentieth century. The fact that Beach Haven's 1870's "farmhouse" was architect-designed perhaps best captures the irony of Philadelphia's elite seeking rustic experiences which required significant money. The local year-round residents (fishermen, etc.) lived in smaller, impermanent homes which have not survived.

## PART II. ARCHITECTURAL INFORMATION

### A. General Statement:

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<sup>7</sup> Ibid., Part VIII.

<sup>8</sup> Parts IX and X of Nash's series describe the house in particular detail. Many of the most significant points have been included in this essay and the architectural description.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid., Part IV.

1. Architectural character: The Sherborne Farmhouse is a rectangular plan, centered-gable house with Italianate and Gothic Revival forms and details. In 1910 the second owner transformed the more modest 1870s house, making it far more grand in appearance by raising it one story on brick piers, and later adding a portico to the front stairway. A second "rear" building, to the east, shares architectural details such as window framing, exterior clapboard and shingle combinations, and finials. This annex contained a kitchen for the main house and servants' quarters, serving in the winter as a residence for the caretaker. It is unclear whether this wing was built as part of original design or was added later. Although the "Farm" was used for entertaining sport-hunters, the main building has a grand appearance from its architectural detailing. The raising enhanced the structure's vertical gothic aspect.
2. Condition of fabric: The house is in excellent condition.

B. Description of Exterior:

1. Overall dimensions: The house is a two-and-a-half-story, five-bay-by-three-bay rectangular structure with a two story rear wing.
2. Foundations: The house rests on square brick piers.
3. Wall construction: The walls are of narrow, wood clapboard construction. For at least a period, the top half of north face was decorated with patterned shingles.
4. Structural system, framing: The structural system is of wood, presumably balloon, framing.
5. Porches: There is a wide, open, one-story porch along the house's south front. It is supported by Italianate-style posts and brackets which meet to form flat arches. A portico over the front steps has been added to the center of the porch. The porch originally wrapped around the north and south sides, but has been enclosed (see alterations).
6. Chimneys: There are two corbelled chimneys; the fireplaces possibly hidden inside walls according to Mrs. Frazer.

7. Openings:

a. Doorways and doors: The front door is centered, with transom and sidelights.

b. Windows: The windows are two-over-two-light sash, with the first-floor windows being elongated. The windows are segmental-arched with wooden shutters and wooden trim. The west front windowheads are squared, while most of the other windows have arched trim. The four gable ends have two paired, arched windows, with the west front gable pair being narrower, comprising one bay, with an incised floral motif above.

8. Roof:

a. Shape, covering: The roof is cross-gabled, with exposed rafters, and narrow ridge-and-rake vergeboard trim. Turned spindle finials top each gable peak while pendants mark the gable ends.

c. Towers: A small square elevator tower (now without equipment) was added at southeast corner.

C. Description of Interior:

1. Floor plans:

a. Cellar: After Beck raised the house, the cellar accommodated a coal-fired steam heating plant and coal storage bins for the winter, two bathhouses and a shower cubicle, a wine cellar, mushroom house and electrical system and kerosene-driven generator.

b. First floor: Off of the center hall, the living room occupies the main building's southwest corner, with the sun parlor and Beck's den filling the southwest quadrant. In the northwest quadrant is the dining room, while the northeast quadrant holds a short back hall and pantries, and then a food preparation/kitchen area which was probably once an open walkway between the main house and the rear wing.

c. Second floor: Considered to be the "family floor" in Beck's days, the second floor has five bedrooms, a large bathroom, a storeroom, and a sewing nook behind the bathroom.

d. Third floor: The third floor has four bedrooms and one bathroom; in the first decade of Beck ownership, one bedroom was occupied by Beck's mother-in-law, while



the other three accommodated guests.

2. Flooring: The flooring is wood, a mix of original and more recent floors; some of upper story has wide-board pine.
3. Wall and ceiling finish: The walls and ceilings are plaster, with papering. The first- and second-story hall and stairwell are covered with lincrusta. This is probably the same covering Beck put up in the 1920s.<sup>10</sup>
4. Decorative features: The house has many furnishings from Beck's decades, verified from photographs and the recollections of Beck's grandson. These include oak dining room furniture, Beck's desk, a mahogany armoire, and highback bed. The awnings visible in 1920s photographs are stored in the basement, as are the porch screens, and the dining room light fixture.
5. Mechanical systems: Charles Beck used an acetylene gas system, having convinced Beach Haven to install an acetylene plant to replace kerosene lamps. And before the town had electricity, Beck replaced his gas plant with a 32-volt generator.

D. Site:

1. General Setting: With most of the original property sold off, the farm now sits among more modern homes. Unlike the surrounding buildings which face north and south at this point in the block, the farm stands out for facing west.
2. Outbuildings: The "Farm" had numerous outbuildings over the years, and it is possible that some of them are still standing. A cottage built in connection with the farm still stands nearby.

Prepared by: Alison Isenberg  
HABS Historian  
Summer 1992

PART III. SOURCES OF INFORMATION

A. Old views: The present owners, the Frazers, have a collection of photographs of the building. Mrs. Frazer is particularly knowledgeable about the building's history.

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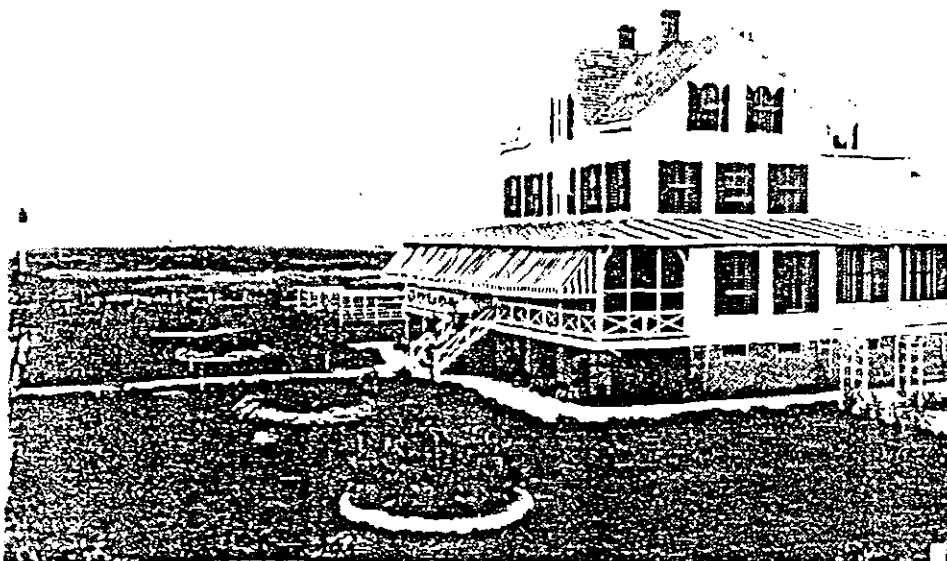
<sup>10</sup> Ibid., Part IX.

B. Primary and unpublished sources: The most helpful account of the building during Beck's ownership is a series of articles written by his grandson Charles Edgar Nash and published in The Beach Haven Times from late 1979 and early 1980, one date being December 5, 1979. (The Long Beach Island Historical Society has compiled these articles.) Charles W. Beck was a significant citizen in Beach Haven, and materials relating to his family, business undertakings, and property, are accessible in newspapers and probably in manuscript records, although it does not appear that a concentrated collection exists. Local historian John Bailey Lloyd, librarian at the Ocean County Library, is also knowledgeable about sources and photographs, and has published two books relating to the history of Long Beach Island. Article and photos in the Public Ledger pictorial section of December 19, 1916. The SandPaper, July 3, 1985, contains an article by William Geiger titled "Down on the Farm" regarding the history of farming in the area. See also:

Sebold, Kimberly, and Sara Amy Leach. Historic Themes and Resources within the New Jersey Coastal Heritage Trail: Southern New Jersey and the Delaware Bay. Washington, D.C.: U.S. Department of the Interior, 1991.

#### PART IV. PROJECT INFORMATION

The project was sponsored by the New Jersey Coastal Heritage Trail (NJCHT) of the National Park Service, Janet Wolf, director. The documentation was undertaken by the Historic American Buildings Survey (HABS), Robert Kapsch, chief, under the direction of Sara Amy Leach, HABS historian. The project was completed during summer 1992. The project historian was Alison Isenberg (University of Pennsylvania). The photography was produced by David Ames, University of Delaware, Center for Historic Architecture and Engineering.

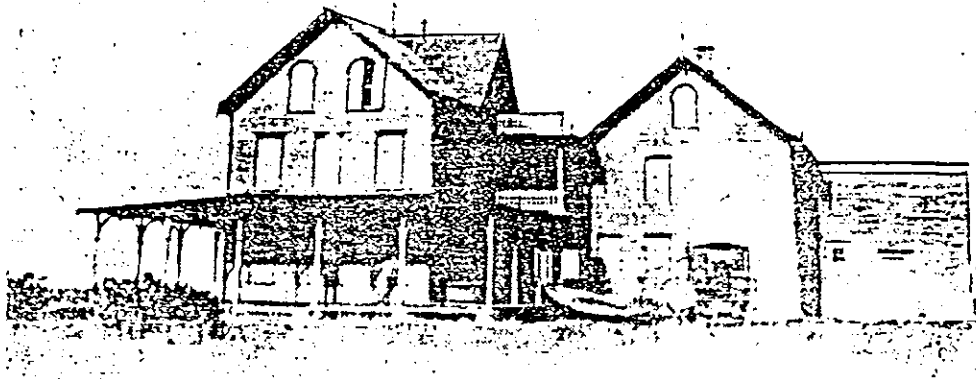


"The Farm" in all its glory is pictured in this photo taken in the early part of this century. Its membership included some of the best known names in the state, including governors and senators. In 1907, the gun club expanded to include yachting.



Grandpa (Charles W.) Beck, at the snare drum, preferred band music and at this 1917 house party at "The Farm" including state senators and Vice Chancellor and former Gov. Walter E. Edge, on the bass drum, who went on to become ambassador to France.

From The Beach Haven Times, 1979-80. Courtesy of The Long Beach Island Historical Society. (see primary sources in history)



Pictured above is the Sherborne Farm before it was purchased by Grandpa Charles W. Beck. Grandpa bought the land and building in about 1910 and transformed it, pictured below, by raising the structure six feet, keeping it well out of the reach of storm tides.



From The Beach Haven Times, 1979-80. Courtesy of the Long Beach Island Historical Society (see primary sources in history).

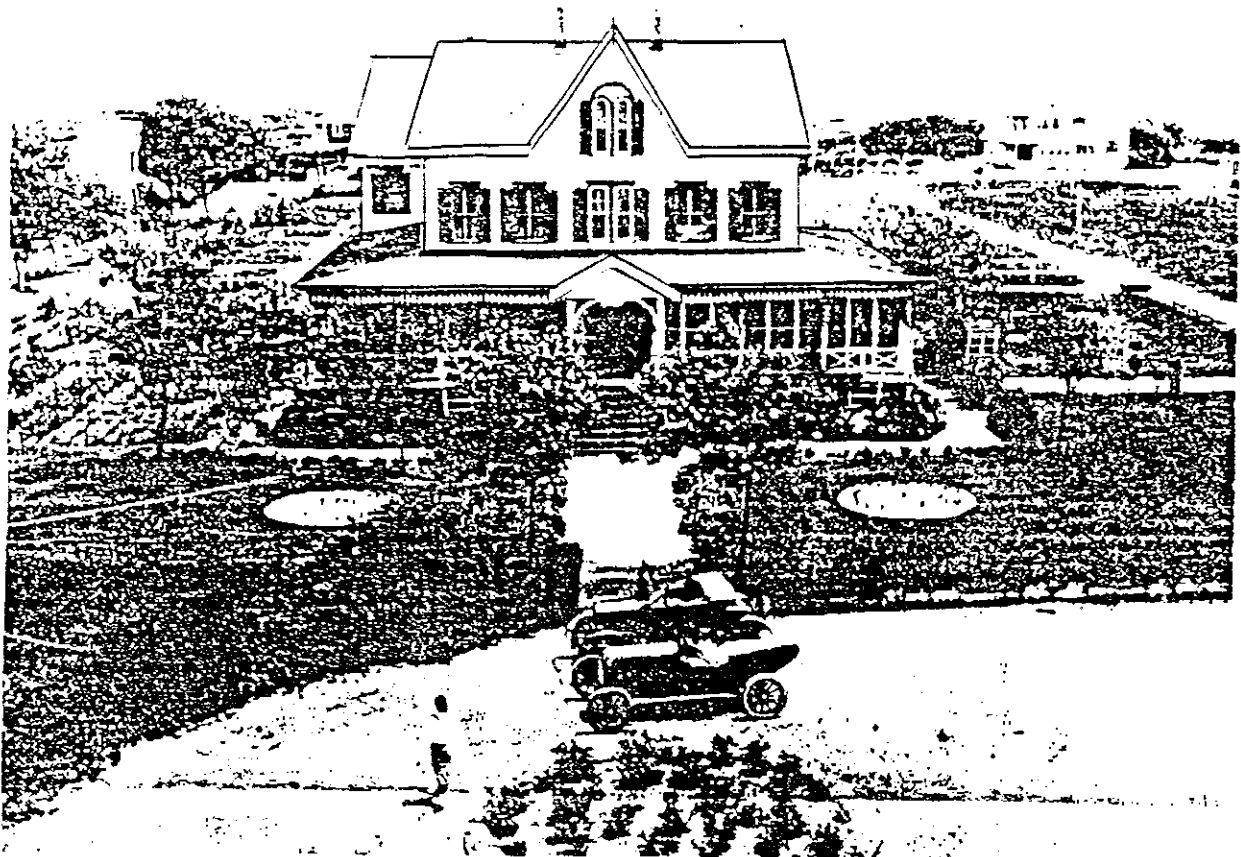
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# *Down on the Farm*

Where Pine Trees Grow, Corn and Cows Flourished



Geiger, William, "Down on the Farm," *The SandPaper*, 3 July 1985, 49.  
Copy courtesy of the Long Beach Island Historical Society.

*The SandPaper*, Wednesday, July 3, 1985